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Ailwood, Joanne (2008) *Learning or earning in the 'Smart State' : changing tactics for governing early childhood*. *Childhood: a global journal of child research*, 15(4). pp. 535-551.

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## **Learning or earning in the 'Smart State': Changing tactics for governing early childhood**

It has been suggested that childhood is one point at which broader social pictures can be drawn and narratives created (Moss & Petrie 2002). In Australia, within the western ascendance of big picture discourses of globalisation, advanced liberalism, knowledge economies and lifelong learning, many changes to the provision of early childhood education and care have taken place. These changes are promoted by, in part at least, the rising numbers of women returning to the paid work force while their children are young, the need to provide care for young children before formal schooling and the increasingly corporate nature of this before school provision in Australia. In this paper I make an analysis of how these shifting discursive regimes, both within early childhood education and care and on a broader scale, have produced the conditions of possibility for the new preparatory year in Queensland's government schools. This analysis investigates what new tactics, strategies and practices this year of preparatory schooling enables. In making this analysis, I aim to provide one narrative of Queensland's society and the place of early childhood education within it.

A preparatory year of education in Queensland government schools is currently in the process of being established and will be in place for 2007. This will be a universally available, non-compulsory year of schooling provided by the Queensland government for children turning five. The groundwork on which this agenda has emerged is related to a complex mix of global, national and state based discursive trends. It is also integrally bound up in the history of Queensland government preschool provision. In developing this particular narrative, I have two points to make. First, that the adults required in advanced liberal, knowledge based economies require a different sort of childhood to the one produced through dominant discourses of modernism such as developmental psychology where the end point was the modern, rational adult necessary to modern societies and liberal economies.

Secondly, I suggest practices that have been largely private in early childhood education and care are increasingly made public, and subject to accountability, quality and efficiency measures. To develop these two points I use the changes in early education in Queensland as my example, and make my analysis using the governmentality work of Foucault (2000/1978) and its further rearticulation by Rose (1993, 1996, 1999, 2004).

### ***Governmentality***

Governmentality, as is widely suggested by those who follow the work of Foucault, is the conduct of conduct (Foucault 2000/1978). The conduct of conduct considers layers of managing and governing of ourselves and of others. The questions this enables us to ask revolve around at least two layers. First, there are questions that may be posed regarding the tactics, strategies and regimes of truth, knowledge and practice which are functioning to provide the conditions of possibility through which our conduct is managed; by ourselves and by others (Rose 1993, 1996, 1999; Dean 1999). Secondly, there are questions that may be asked about the everyday mundane actions of our daily lives, and the ways in which we govern our own daily behaviours and that of those around us. This aspect of governmentality is also understood as technologies of the self (Foucault 2000/1978). I am more concerned with the first of these sets of questions, in other words with conditions of possibility and studying the emergence of particular ways of knowing about young children and their education, and the regimes of truth, knowledge and practice that govern young children's lives (and the lives of their parents and teachers) in education and care institutions.

Studies of governmentality are practical, for as Dean (1999: 18) points out, 'to analyse mentalities of government is to analyse thought made practical and technical'. Furthermore, studies of governmentality are concerned with the ways in which particular knowledges at particular moments become established within circuits of power, forming regimes of truth, practice and thought. In early childhood education and care a wide range of knowledges and discourses of childhood, families, parenting and education collide. The multitude of institutional and organisational methods for managing and producing childhood in early childhood

education and care settings function around these wide ranging knowledges and discourses.

Some researchers in early childhood education and care (ECEC) are making use of governmentality and the opportunities it provides for analysis (e.g. Dahlberg & Moss 2005; Bloch, Holmlund, Moqvist & Popkewitz 2003; Hultqvist & Dahlberg 2001; Hultqvist 1997). Much of this research is concerned with the ways in which particular knowledges at particular times become established within circuits of power to create regimes of truth, practice and thought in ECEC. This allows the further analysis of how subjects in ECEC become thinkable and manageable. Recognising that childhood and ECEC are situated within these circuits of power allows for a cutting away the 'commonsense' to reveal its contingency and construction (Foucault 2000/1981). This work is important for the retention of a space for remembering that dominant regimes of truth, thought and practice are not infallible, that regimes can and must be open to thought, analysis, critique and change.

### ***Advanced liberalism***

Advanced liberal economies is not a term used in order to imply a linear progression of liberalism, rather, it is used to indicate the opening up of new ways of governing which sit along side, in concert and in conflict with other forms of techniques for governing. Shifting techniques for governing imply shifting rationalities for the ways in which governing is thought about, and as Rose (1999) has suggested, governmentality can be understood as a function of thought. Use of the term advanced liberal economies, therefore, is an indication of shifting functions of thought about how we are to be governed and to govern each other that are not necessarily rational or linear, but that are extant nonetheless.

One tactic that has been activated in the production and thought of advanced liberalism is that of lifelong learning (Rose 1999, Edwards 2002). This tactic is deeply connected into the production of the enterprising individual who is constantly seeking to maximise itself. Rose (1996: 154 original emphasis) explains;

The enterprising self will make an enterprise of its life, seek to maximize its own human capital, project itself a future, and seek to shape itself in order to become that which it wishes to be. The enterprising self is thus both an active

self and a calculating self, a self that calculates *about* itself and that acts *upon* itself in order to better itself.

Advanced liberalism, he argues, necessitates the creation of free choosing individuals, while inventing new modes of surveillance. Rose (1993: 295) also suggests that advanced liberal government,

...entails the adoption of a range of devices that seek to recreate the distance between the decisions of formal political institutions and other social actors, and to act upon these actors in new ways, through shaping and utilizing their freedom.

Many societies that could be labelled advanced liberal can also be considered knowledge or information economies. These societies are increasingly dependent upon innovation, information and knowledge production for their development and maintenance. Within the context of these shifts and unevenness, lifelong learning has become a persuasive and dominant regime of truth in a range of Australian political and economic discourses. Lifelong learning is, however, a broader western discourse, evident for example in research based in **Sweden (\*\*\*\*\*, 2006)** and the UK (Edwards & Nicoll 2004). Furthermore, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) points out that, 'lifelong learning for all is the guiding framework for OECD's work on learning, both formal and informal' (OECD 2005a: np). At the 2005 meeting of the OECD Education Chief Executives there were three major themes for discussion. These were: quality, equity and efficiency; lifelong learning and the employment challenge; and the challenges of globalisation (OECD 2005b). It is clear then, that lifelong learning is a major signifier in the political and economic agendas of western nation states.

From the analytic perspective provided through governmentality, producing lifelong learning, self maximising selves requires changes in thought and changes in the tactics and strategies used in government and governing. Such changes in thought require that we think about and manage ourselves as lifelong learners engaging with such amorphous ideas as globalisation, advanced liberalism and knowledge economies. However, in conducting our conduct governments do not necessarily invent new knowledges, practices or tactics for governing, rather they will be

‘...harnessing already existing micro-fields of power in order to link their governmental objectives with activities and events far distant in space and time’ (Rose 1999: 18). As La Perriere (in Foucault 2000/1978: 208) pointed out, ‘government is the right disposition of things, arranged so as to lead to a convenient end’. In many advanced liberal, knowledge economies the convenient end is a citizenry of entrepreneurial, reflexive and self-maximising subjects. Lifelong learning is a one path through which this convenient end is arranged, for as Hultqvist and Dahlberg (2001: 7) suggest ‘welfare and the caring for the self have become a lifelong involvement; the concept of “lifelong learning” is an indication of this development’.

I turn now to investigate what ‘micro-fields of power’ may have been utilised in creating the year of schooling prior to the compulsory years in Queensland government schools; the preparatory year. In this investigation, lifelong learning in advanced liberal and knowledge based economies clamour to form a backdrop for the invention and reinvention of strategies, techniques and tactics for governing. To do this work it is necessary to undertake some brief genealogical investigations to explicate the regimes of truth, thought and practice in circulation in Australia.

### ***Federal agendas in a ‘knowledge economy’***

In Australia, our federal system of government means that policy and economic responsibility for various forms of ECEC provision is dependent on a number of issues – making for a very complex and ‘clunky’ system. For example, non-compulsory care and education is a combined responsibility of the federal and state or territory governments, but is largely funded by the federal government. Compulsory schooling is predominantly the residual constitutional responsibility of the states and territories. To increase this complexity the federal government is by far wealthier than the states and territories, collecting personal income tax nationally and redistributing this to the states and territories. The year of early childhood educational provision in question here, the preparatory year in Queensland government schools, while a non-compulsory year of schooling, is a state responsibility. Therefore, while the Queensland government retains the final decision making and funding responsibilities, the federal government does have some impact and influence, in this case largely contextual rather than financial. This brief overview of the federal context

illustrates the 'family resemblances' in Australian political discourses that give 'strategic coherence' (Rose 2004: 323) to the central governmentality arguments of this paper.

The Australian federal context can be illustrated through a document produced in 2000, *Learning for the knowledge society, an education and training action plan for the information economy* (DETYA 2000). In this document the emergence of the Australian lifelong learning, self maximising subject is apparent. It states, for example, that 'each part of the education and training sector has a role to play in developing the people who will power the information economy' (DETYA 2000: 8). Batterham (2001: 15 original emphasis) in *The Chance to Change*, his report to the federal government when he was Chief Scientist, describes a knowledge economy as denoting,

...the shift from *material* to *knowledge and intellectual resources* as the base for economic growth. A distinguishing feature of the knowledge economy is the increased importance of tacit, as opposed to codified, knowledge and intangible capital.

*The Chance to Change* runs parallel to the federal policy on innovation, *Backing Australia's Ability* (Commonwealth of Australia 2001). In this policy it is suggested that if Australia is to take, 'a road of high growth based on the value of our intellectual capital, we need to stimulate, nurture and reward creativity and entrepreneurship' (Commonwealth of Australia 2001: 4). This ambitious aim is, as seems almost inevitable, produced within the discourse of lifelong learning.

While a component of the *Backing Australia's Ability* policy is to review education, teaching and teacher education, there is currently no commitment within this for preschool education. Indeed as the Australian Education Union (2001) reports, the federal government shows no inclination to renew federal involvement in the funding and provision of preschool education. Instead the focus is on industry, training, information and communication technologies and the rewarding of research and innovation related to these areas. While there have been recent rumblings in this area, for example, a consultation paper *Towards the Development of a National Agenda for Early Childhood* (Department of Families and Community Services 2003),

and the appointment of three prominent Australian early childhood educators and researchers as Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs Research Fellows (Raban 2000; Flear 2000; Yelland 2001), very little of policy substance has resulted.

***Producing the Smart State: a collection of thought, tactics and strategies***

The current state government in Queensland, led by Premier Peter Beattie, has been aggressively pursuing its reinvention of Queensland as 'the Smart State' since 1998. The Smart State is driven by discourses of economic reform in a globalised world, including an emphasis on a knowledge economy. The language through which the Smart State is produced is strongly entrepreneurial, designed to portray Queensland as a fast-paced, world class, knowledge-based, competitive and generally all around fabulous place to be. After all, not only is Queensland the Smart State, it also has a 'high standard of living, great lifestyle and sunny climate' (Beattie 2002).

The first phase of this reinvention has morphed into phase two, and producing Queensland as 'The Smart State' is projected through until at least 2015 in government documents (Queensland Government 2005). Within phase two, Queenslanders are encouraged to maintain the momentum of the Smart State initiatives, since 'if we don't continue to change, Queensland will become a technological and education backwater, slumbering in the sun' (Queensland Government 2005: 2). While the thought of slumbering in the sun conjures up a rather pleasant picture, those who live in Queensland are exhorted to desire a different, more 'advanced', fast paced lifestyle.

Across both phases of the Smart State agenda language such as 'vigorous', 'new-age' and 'new jobs' is used and regular reference is made to research and science based industries such as biotechnology, biomedical science, information technology, nanotechnology and communication technology. However, while these new fields are viewed as essential, it is also considered,

...crucial to apply *Smart State solutions* in our traditional industries, such as mining, manufacturing, construction and farming, to ensure that they remain *ultra-competitive in the world market place* (Beattie 2002 my emphasis).



Businesses are also compelled to take part in the Smart State,

...one of the best ways of being competitive is for a business to be among the first to *adopt high tech solutions*. We are encouraging small businesses to *think smart* and to ensure they are using *world-class, cutting-edge* approaches to their businesses so that they are *ultra-competitive* (Beattie 2002 my emphasis).

Within the Smart State, these competitive, cutting edge 'Smart State approaches' require a subjects who are self-maximising, lifelong learners and earners. Education, therefore, is high on this government's agenda. Across the range of schooling and Technical and Further Education (TAFE) sectors, and within the Smart State regime, education plays a central role. The discussion from which the above quotes were drawn continues;

But these strategies will not work if we do not have a highly-educated and skilled workforce.

That's why we are radically modernising our education and training systems to make them more relevant to the needs of young job seekers in the new millennium.

We will give them the education and training that will enable them to reach their full potential so they are ready for a lifetime of learning and earning (Beattie 2002).

Further, in phase two of the Smart State regime it is suggested that,

Queensland's education system is being rebuilt from the ground up, across the early, middle and senior phases of learning (Queensland Government 2005: 25).

The Smart State regime pervades the production of Queensland's government. The *Queensland Families: Future Directions* (Queensland Government 2002c) policy is a 'Smart State Initiative'. This document has an explicit intertextual and interdepartmental link with the *Education and Training Reforms for the Future* document (Queensland Government 2002a), referring to family needs in the context of the preparatory year. Within another strategic document, *The Future is Here* (Queensland Government 2002b), Queensland is 'building a smart workforce'

through a 'world class' and 'innovative' government education system (Queensland Government 2002b: 8). The discursive regime of the Smart State has become the guiding force in the reinvention of Queensland in the context of advanced liberal, knowledge-based economies.

While the discursive regime of the Smart State holds enormous and positive potential for education in Queensland, it must also be considered potentially dangerous (Foucault 1982). As has already been pointed out, the government funded education system in Queensland is currently being 'rebuilt from the ground up' (Queensland Government 2005: 2). While this is somewhat of a political spin and exaggeration there are certainly major shifts afoot. I now make a closer analysis of the Smart State regime and its production of preparatory education in Queensland, in particular focusing upon the implications of getting ready for lifelong learning and earning in the Smart State and making public of previously private early childhood practice.

### ***A brief history of the present: education in the smart state***

As a parent of school-age children I, like all other Queensland parents, want my kids to have the best education possible so they are ready for a lifetime of learning and earning (Peter Beattie in Queensland Government 2002a: np).

This statement from Peter Beattie appears in his message at the beginning of the *Education and Training Reforms for the Future* document. It is a statement that not only provides a personal identification with other parents of school children, it also personalises and legitimates the government's position on the need for young people to be either learning or earning. After all, as Beattie seems to be implying, this is what every 'good' parent wants. In order to focus on the production of the lifelong learner in Queensland it is necessary to first provide a brief history of this present. This explores the conditions of possibility that have enable the current shifts to occur. The key question here is how the Queensland government has been able to create their smart state regime, and in doing so, create a society in which all children and young people are required to be 'working on themselves'. As will become evident, unemployment of any kind is not an option for children and young people. Being an earner or a learner is now an obligation for young people that can be equated with

adult unemployment and job training schemes, regularly evident as a governing tactic in advanced liberal economies (Rose 1999).

To highlight the significance of the changes currently taking place, I will first very briefly describe preschool education in Queensland government schools. This year of education prior to formal schooling began in 1973. The provision was a part-time, voluntary year intending to provide children with a bridge from home to school. It was never introduced as a form of care while mothers were undertaking paid work, indeed it was considered necessary that mothers be closely involved in the preschool program as volunteers. It was also introduced as a quite separate unit fenced off from the primary school – with preschool being described as an extension of the home, rather than being simply a preparation for school (Byrne 1986). Although somewhat contradictory, preschool provision was also justified within deficit discourses, with preschool first provided in ‘areas of need’, for ‘bringing children up to the normal level of readiness in the basic primary school subjects’ (Department of Education and Cultural Activities [DECA] 1972). Not all schools had a preschool and provision, therefore, was not universal. This voluntary, part time and non-universal level of provision remained in place until the Queensland Government reignited debate over educational provision by the state during the late 1990s.

In April 1999, *The Next Decade: A discussion about the future of Queensland state schools* was released. This discussion paper formed the initial consultation stage in the development of Education Queensland’s corporate policy strategy, *Queensland State Education 2010* (Education Queensland, 2001 [QSE 2010]). Public forums and consultations followed this discussion paper and a report on these was published in a special edition of *Education Views* (September 1999), Education Queensland’s in house newspaper. Two themes were dominant in the responses to the discussion paper. The first theme was the need for Education Queensland to provide educational options that reflected the diversity of social, cultural, geographic and aspirational factors amongst the students and families who use government schools. Secondly, there was a desire on the part of teachers and principals for a more flexible and locally responsive approach to curriculum and policy development. Within these themes, major issues or problems were then identified. The first two

problems were the need for market research and the need for state school differentiation that enables innovation and local developments.

Third on the list of issues or problems was preschool and the early years of education. A range of factors were raised within this issue, for example, the lack of appropriate preschool places in government schools, the changing needs of parents and families, links to the compulsory years of schooling and the importance of early intervention strategies. Importantly, it was recognised in the discussion paper that 'dissatisfaction with the [preschool] service offered pushes parents to the private sector and they do not necessarily return' (*Education Views* September 1999: 6). Given that government schools across Australia are consistently losing enrolment share, which in turn has implications such as the loss of federal funding, recognising preschool provision as a point at which parents may be attracted to government schools is significant. It is within the context of the responses to the discussion paper, particularly the need to provide a preschool year that was more attractive to parents and families in an attempt to maintain enrolment share that provided the basis for the preparatory year.

*Queensland State Education 2010: 'new education' for 'new times'*

As previously pointed out, *QSE 2010* is the current corporate and strategic framework for government education in Queensland. Beattie's foreword points out that this document is intended to capture the moment and provide a broad contextual framework for the next decade, rather than provide a point by point account of what Education Queensland intends to do (Education Queensland 2001). *QSE 2010* is framed up within the dominant Smart State discourse of producing a knowledge-based economy in a globalising world. It acknowledges the rapidity of change and the need for new and innovative approaches to schooling.

To this end (and amongst many other objectives) the document suggests that New Basics, New Pathways, New Foundations, New Opportunities to Learn and a New Deal on Equity are central to the Smart State agenda (Education Queensland 2001: 15-17). Of these it is the New Pathways and New Foundations that are of interest for the analysis at hand. Managing multiple pathways through schooling and providing the appropriate foundations for these pathways have been a recent focal point for

Education Queensland. It is these two objectives from *QSE 2010* agenda that are the central concerns of *Education and Training Reforms for the Future* (Queensland Government 2002a), to which I now turn.

### *Education and Training Reforms for the Future*

The *Education and Training Reforms for the Future* document is a key component of the *QSE 2010* agenda. It is composed of three parts: part one is the 'getting ready for school trial', part two is information and communication technologies for school and work and part three is getting ready for work or further study. The placement of these three issues together in the *Education and Training Reforms for the Future* document is explicitly linked into the Queensland government's Smart State agenda. The reforms suggested in this document have both significant and very expensive implications. However,

...this is part of the Government's drive to build the Smart State. This is an investment in Queensland's future which will ensure we take our rightful place in this new and dynamic century and the highly competitive global economy. It will ensure jobs and prosperity for our children.

Our Smart State Strategy is about creating 21<sup>st</sup> century jobs and a diversified economy with a major investment in traditional and new industries. It is also about skilling and educating our people, so Queenslanders can take up these jobs now and in the future (Beattie, in Queensland Government 2002a: np).

The Queensland government is very serious about its Smart State regime, and is taking positive steps towards producing their Smart State. The remainder of this paper asks the central governmentality question of 'how?'. That is, within the Smart State regime, how is the government provision of preschool education being produced, and how are the tactics, strategies and practices of this preschool education being changed, appropriated or marginalised in this process?

### *Getting ready for school*

In terms of early childhood education, the *Education and Training Reforms for the Future* (Queensland Government 2002a) document discusses three points that were identified, via the community consultations for *QSE 2010* with parents and educators,

as important areas in need of attention. They are: a) meeting the needs of children starting school, b) considering the age children start school, and c) fitting preschool into the daily work and family lives of parents (Queensland Government 2002a: 1).

A central concern of the getting ready for school trial was built around the school starting age, 5 turning 6 by 31 December in the first year of schooling, currently the youngest in Australia by five months. This concern feeds off the federal agenda of national testing and benchmarks. The results of these national tests indicate that Queensland has a higher than the national average number of year 3 and 5 children not attaining the national benchmark. Given that Queensland children are at least five months younger than children in these year levels in other states, an injection of a full time preparatory year of education, accompanied by raising the formal school entry age (by 6 months), is viewed as one means to remedy this. This position is based in a range of 'early inoculation' discourses (Luke & Luke 2001), such as early childhood education leading to a reduction in delinquency and disruptive behaviours, while improving school outcomes and providing the 'first step in lifelong learning' (Queensland Government 2002a: 1).

*Learning or earning for all young people: producing the lifelong learner*

The Queensland Studies Authority's (QSA) outline of the *Early Years Curriculum Guidelines*, the curriculum under development for the preparatory year, made the Minister's agenda regarding the preparatory year very clear. The preparatory year is to be about preparing for the compulsory years of schooling – or getting ready for school. The project profile pointed out that 'The Minister...advised that this curriculum was to include an Early Learning and Development Framework that would guide teachers' monitoring of children's progress and their preparedness for Year 1 – that is, their 'school readiness' (QSA 2002: np). Areas that were identified for particular attention in the *Early Years Curriculum Guidelines* 'are social and self-organisation skills, motor development and early literacy, numeracy and oracy' (QSA 2002: np). While these are all laudable areas of attention, the list is also striking in its adherence to a rather traditional view of the schooling children are getting ready for. Given that Queensland is to be the Smart State and that Information and Communication Technologies are fundamental to that vision, it does seem that the exclusion of these from the preparatory year 'wish list' could be considered as lacking in foresight.

Within *QSE 2010*, the Queensland government's Smart State regime is centrally concerned with 'add[ing] value to individuals and to the common good by giving the opportunity to all, irrespective of background or circumstance, to reach the highest levels of schooling attainment' (Education Queensland 2001: 12). Within this discourse, the preparatory year is strategically aimed towards laying 'the appropriate foundation for success in school for all students' (Education Queensland 2001: 16). As Rose (1999: 145) points out, in advanced liberal societies the government's 'political responsibility is to provide...training, combat discrimination, help with childcare for lone parents...But your political responsibility as a citizen is to improve your own lot through selling your labour on the market'. This reflects the political rationality underpinning the Smart State discourse and the introduction of the preparatory year. For young children in Queensland, the preparatory year is aimed towards getting them ready for a lifetime of learning or earning as they grow into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The conditions of possibility provided through advanced liberalism and knowledge economies in Queensland have produced a preparatory child that is predominantly thought of as a potential adult *learner or earner* rather than the previously more dominant *developer* who is a potentially modern, rational adult. The *Early Years Curriculum Guidelines* for the preparatory year opens with a statement to the effect that a central focus of the preparatory year is the 'valuing and highlighting [of] the contribution of early childhood education to lifelong learning' (QSA 2005: 1). Rather than 'job readiness' (Rose 1999: 162), young children are to be judged on their 'school readiness', as indeed are their preparatory teachers whose job it is to 'make' them ready.

While young children remain potential adults, within the discourses of advanced liberal knowledge economies the adults they are to become are less certain, less structured, more flexible, more reflexive and more responsible for the maximisation of their selves. The foundations are laid for young children to grow into the demand to take responsibility for their own selves and their own destinies as life long learners and earners.

Within the government's discourses at least, the dominant early childhood developmental agenda has been watered down and marginalised. Despite long term critique of developmental psychology's dominance in early childhood education and care (e.g. Burman 1994, Walkerdine 1984), most of early childhood's enduring and valued practices remain embedded in these discourses (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence 1999). In the documents produced around the preparatory year in Queensland government schools, the dominance of developmental psychology remains, however, it is now in serious competition with notions of preparation for compulsory schooling and laying the foundations for lifelong learning.

The eclectic mix of influences cited in the *Early Years Curriculum Guidelines*, places long standing and ubiquitous developmental psychology thought along side more recent sociology of childhood thought, as well as practices based in the Reggio Emilia 'approach' emphasising the competence of the child. It could be suggested that in the preparatory year, the space for a shift in early childhood discourses has opened up – in part at least – because to become a successful advanced liberal, knowledge economy Queensland's society *requires* competent selves – regardless of age.

#### *Private and public practice: preparatory teachers in advanced liberalism*

The preparatory year could be considered, therefore, an example of how to provide appropriate foundations for the production of self-maximising, advanced liberal subjects (Rose 1996). Within this production of preparatory year children, there is evidence of the tight linkage of constructions of motherhood, childhood and early childhood education. Preschool was initially provided on a part-time basis in Queensland government schools, on the understanding that mothers would be at home and available to participate in voluntary preschool work. However, the preparatory year is based on growing evidence of the complex needs of families, particularly mothers. The existence of the preparatory year is, in part, a response to the fact of mothers in paid work and is thus an adult response to the need for a more adult 'user-friendly' system of early childhood education.

For early childhood teachers, the preparatory year may provide further support for their professional status and worth. However, within the preparatory discourses they



are constituted to a large extent as the producers and monitors of the school ready child. Making use of Rose (1999: 153), I would suggest that in the preparatory year the 'enclosures within which expertise could insulate themselves from 'political interference' in the name of 'professional autonomy' are punctured'. That is, the relatively private practice of preschool education, where the teachers and children were in a space apart from, but alongside, the primary school, is becoming recognised as the 'space before'. As the space where the foundations for producing lifelong learners and earners are laid, and young children are 'made ready' for their primary schooling.

It could be argued that this 'making ready' is not new, after all the provision of preschool in 1973 had been partly justified within a frame of children's deficit and the need to make them ready for the school system (DECA 1972). However, the language, thought and practices attached to teaching 'deficit' children – especially those whose class or race required them to be pulled into order – in the 1970s has shifted. Furthermore, government preschool provision was not universal, whereas the new preparatory year is to be universally available to those parents who want their child to attend. The making ready is now embedded in the language and thought of a life of learning and earning for all. The preschool as a separate, fenced off, home-like bridge to formal schooling has, quite literally, been unfenced, renamed and relocated within the grounds of primary schools. This actual taking down of fences and physical relocation reflects the changing conceptualisation of this year of education prior to formal schooling; and within these changes teachers' work has become more exposed to broader discourses and the demands of schools, parents and political communities.

Creating accountable and calculable (Rose 1999) preparatory education spaces has not occurred suddenly. Rather, it has been a slow building up and layering through of tactics and strategies for governing preschool education in Queensland's government schools. Over the last decade, the Queensland government has crept into the previously private sphere of preschool education, increasingly submitting it to the glare of public scrutiny and accountability. Curriculum documents and guidelines for preschool education in Queensland have long existed. However, until the recent introduction of the mandatory *Preschool Curriculum Guidelines* (QSCC 1998) other

documents were for voluntary use and preschool teachers were very much left to their own devices. Preschool (and the new preparatory year), after all, is not part of the compulsory education system provided by the Queensland government. Furthermore, teachers were regularly dismissed as 'just playing' all day with their preschool children, and while there were legal requirements and legislations, they made their own professional decisions and judgements.

Throughout the increasing levels of public scrutiny, many preschool teachers have resisted the idea of a 'pushing down' of the state's agenda for formal and compulsory schooling into informal and non-compulsory preschool settings. In this context, play as the pedagogy of early childhood education has become the 'call to arms' for early childhood educators in resisting (and influencing) the state's preparatory year agenda. For example, in the consultation phase, one group of preschool teachers submitted to Education Queensland a list of 'necessary components' for a quality preparatory programme that is topped by the need to acknowledge 'the fact that young children learn best in natural play situations' (P-3 discussion list, August 2002). Another submission from a different group of preschool teachers also presents the need to ensure that the philosophy of a play-based curriculum is supported, particularly given the potentially threatening funding situation (P-3 discussion list, July 2002).

The *Early Years Curriculum Guidelines* eventually produced for the preparatory year explicitly advocate for a play based curriculum. In governmentality terms, this is a fine example of the ways in which governing is not about the power to crush or dominate (Rose 1999), rather about the practical use and management of freedoms in order to achieve the required end. Including high status professional knowledges –in this case play – as the organising framework for the document may ensure some degree of acquiescence amongst the teachers along with a reduced sense of the threat of state interference in their private, professional practice. While on the one hand this can be viewed as a valuing of early childhood educators' knowledge and practices, it is also a quite brilliant harnessing of professional knowledges to achieve specific politically desired ends.

As mentioned earlier, the curriculum document is an eclectic assemblage of ideas regarding early childhood education. It includes, for the first time in this year before

compulsory schooling in Queensland government schools, a clear and explicit discussion of monitoring and assessing young children via an *Early Learning Record* (QSA 2005: 56). I raise this not to expose a negative, but to indicate the new tactics brought into play in order to guide the conduct of conduct within a changing social environment. Monitoring, assessing, evaluating young children is a necessary part of the daily work of early childhood educators. Within the *Early Learning Record* assessment discourses have been harnessed and this language has produced an officially sanctioned means for managing and monitoring the school ready child.

The making public of preparatory teachers' practice is not necessarily a shift to cause concern, particularly given research on teacher professional learning communities and the importance of shared and public practice to these communities (e.g. Seashore Louis, Kruse & Marks 1996; Lingard et al 2001). However, the shift has not been produced through the knowledge bases of this research and related professional discourses, but is quite firmly functioning in the discourses of producing lifelong learners and earners, who are capable of maximising their selves in an advanced liberal knowledge economy.

## **Conclusion**

Not the first time the Queensland government has undertaken a 'reinventing of the preschool child' (Grieshaber 2000). However, the current movement does reflect some significant new strategies for governing young children. These shifting rationalities sit within broader contexts provided through the growing centrality of lifelong learning, reflexive, self-maximising subjects to advanced liberalism and knowledge economies. As the shape of western economies has changed, so too has the shape of workplaces, and the tactics and strategies in place to manage workers within these workplaces, including early childhood education and care. The work of Queensland's early childhood educators in the year prior to compulsory schooling is increasingly becoming public, as their professional practices are produced and managed in order to create the 'school ready' child.

An emphasis on advanced liberal knowledge economies, and the changing political rationalities these economies produce, reveals new ways of thinking about workers and selves. Within these shifts, I have suggested that for early childhood education,

the shape of the adult-to-be impacts upon ways of producing the present child. There is evidence in these new political rationalities that as the governmental thought regarding adults as entrepreneurial selves changes, so too do conceptions of children and childhood. The Queensland government's pursuit of the Smart State is one example of this. The production, management and regulation of these new adults and entrepreneurial selves now begins in the preparatory year of schooling where the foundations are laid for a lifetime of learning or earning in the Smart State.

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